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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000473

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE PRESSES DIALOGUE; EAST TIMORESE JESUIT CRITICAL OF
TIMOR PROTESTS

REF: A. A.) VATICAN 00471,

B. B.) DILI 00218

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

1. (C) The Holy See's Deputy Foreign Minister told Charge May 2 that the situation in East Timor was a source of great concern, and that they were encouraging the bishops and Nuncio to pursue dialogue with the government to resolve the situation. He and an East Timorese Jesuit, Joao Piedade, concurred that the demanding tone of the pastoral letter issued by East Timor's bishops combined with the government's failure to establish a commission to address the education issue had sparked the Church's current conflict with the government [reftels]. For the time being, the Holy See is leaving the situation in the hands of its Nuncio, though Piedade was critical of the Nuncio's engagement to date. Piedade suggested that a Vatican-sanctioned mediator could be appointed in the coming days, but the Vatican FM said such a step would be taken only "if necessary." End Summary.

Vatican: Dialogue "Only Way"

2. (C) Holy See Deputy FM equivalent Monsignor Pietro Parolin said the unrest in East Timor was a cause of concern for the Holy See especially in light of the past. He expressed the Holy See's regret with the method the local bishops had chosen to present their concerns to the government. "Requesting the resignation of a democratically elected prime minister is not the right role for the Church, Parolin stated. Such tactics, he added, can only generate division within the society and among the clergy. Instead, the situation should have been dealt with through dialogue, he believed, and the Holy See was working through its Nuncio to encourage such a dialogue. He understood that the President and Prime Minister had been in touch with the bishops and, though they had not offered anything concrete on the education issue, Parolin thought this was an encouraging step.

Pastoral Letter Leads to Insults

3. (C) For another perspective, Poloff met with Jesuit Father and lecturer a Rome's Gregorian University Joao Piedade, who told Poloff March 2 that the local bishops were responsible for instigating the current Church-government conflict in East Timor with their strident pastoral letter to East Timorese Catholics on the government's plans to eliminate compulsory religious education from the nation's primary and secondary school curricula. According to Father Piedade, the pastoral letter was "arrogant and confrontational." He also had no patience for Church complaints that the government had not responded to the letter. "A pastoral letter is not an official document, he said. "It was not addressed to the government. Why should they have to respond to it?"

4. (C) Piedade argued that the East Timorese Church has to become accustomed to the autonomy of both church and state. "There cannot be a dictatorship of the church. Religious education cannot be compulsory -- it must be by choice," he said. Piedade also argued that elements within the church are manipulating the uneducated faithful. "It is unacceptable for the church to exploit the people's religiosity for political motivations," he said. Piedade added that the clergy in East Timor is already divided. A solid base supports Bishop da Silva, but many feel that the church should stay out of politics, a sentiment Piedade traced to the influence of Pope John Paul II. "The calling of the faithful to political demonstrations is unacceptable," the Jesuit concluded.

5. (C) Piedade was extremely critical of Bishops Ricardo da Silva and Nascimento, noting that he was ashamed and embarrassed that they had stooped to insulting Prime Minister Alkatiri. "Alkatiri is the scapegoat in part because he is Muslim,"

Piedade said, "but in reality he is quite secular-minded." The Jesuit added that Alkatiri had been "peaceful and reasonable in the face of shameful insults," but that the Church could not expect "to push the government any further."

Apostolic Nuncio Unhelpful

16. (C) Piedade believed that Apostolic Nuncio (Vatican ambassador) Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don had been counterproductive and undiplomatic during his March visit to Dili. "The nuncio used his visit as an opportunity to criticize and denounce the government," Piedade said. He claimed that officials at the Vatican Foreign Ministry concurred that this was not the ideal way to handle Church-State relations. Nevertheless, the Vatican's FM left little doubt that for the time being, they were leaving the situation in the hands of the Nuncio to convey their preference for dialogue to the Bishops.

17. (C) Piedade told us he had met with Vatican Deputy Foreign Minister Pietro Parolin March 30 to discuss the crisis, though Parolin himself did not directly confirm the meeting. He said that Parolin, who had managed the East Timor account during the crisis that led to independence, rejected the bishops' accusations that the Fretilin government was simply opposed to religion due to a Marxist ideology. "The majority of the government ministers were educated by the Jesuits, so how could they all be Communists?" he asked. Piedade claimed that neither the Nuncio nor the local bishops were neutral observers; but his suggestion that that Vatican has lost confidence in both as interlocutors was not borne out by Parolin's determination to work through the Nuncio and encourage the bishops. Piedade told us he has also been contacted by East Timorese Foreign Minister Ramos Horta to research an appropriate Concordat with the Vatican that would guarantee East Timor's religious cultural identity, while providing the conditions to allow people to choose their religion freely.

Father Filomeno Pulling the Strings?

18. (C) Piedade said he had suspicions that the real intellectual power behind the protests is fellow Jesuit Father Filomeno Jacob, not Bishop da Silva, whom he described as a "pious man." In 2000, former Bishop of Dili Carlos Belo authorized Filomeno to serve as Social Affairs Minister in the transitional government. Some time later the government released him, and he returned to work for Belo, eventually becoming Secretary to Belo's successor, Bishop da Silva. Piedade believes that Filomeno is bitter, and, blaming the government for his ouster, sees this as an opportunity to reassert his power by manipulating Bishop da Silva behind the scenes. Parolin also indicated that he believed Father Jacob had been a bad influence on the bishop.

Comment

19. (C) The Holy See is clearly concerned that the situation in Dili could get out of control, but they are encouraged by the President's and Prime Minister's efforts to reach out to the bishops and are encouraging the bishops to reciprocate. Piedade, by contrast, fears that if the bishops push the government too far, the confrontation could end in violence, irrevocably damaging the credibility of the Church. For the time being, the Vatican has no intention of sending in an outside mediator, but would do so if the situation deteriorated and the nuncio proved ineffective. According to Piedade, the problem in East Timor is not just religion in education, but education of the Religious. "Priests need to gain greater knowledge of democracies," Piedade observed. "This is a medieval mentality."

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